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Language-in-Education Policy in Multilingual Education

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Language policies and their aspects that impact societies and people are important social phenomena that are not well researched in multicultural and multilingual Kazakhstan. While previous research has investigated how language policies existing in Kazakhstan impact the development of plurilingual individuals (Syzdykbayeva, 2016), this article explores the theory behind the concepts of language policy and specifically language-in-education policy. It analyzes the past and current policies like the Trilingual Policy in Kazakhstan. Using Cooper's (1989) framework of evaluating the language planning and policy and sought answers to the questions: Who plans what (language) practices for whom, how, under what conditions, and for what purpose?

Keywords: language policy, multilingual education, trilingual education policy

Introduction

Drawing on pluralistic ideology, President Nazarbayev shared his strategy that by establishing high proficiency multilingualism in the society, the country's competitiveness in the world market arena would increase by 2020 (Nazarbayev, 2007). The Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter referred to as MES) planned a new language-in-education policy and developed a strategic plan to achieve bilingualism among 90% and trilingualism among 20% of Kazakhstani citizens (MES, 2010). The language-in-education policy is called the Trilingual Policy and the plan to implement it is the State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 (hereinafter referred to as SPED for 2011-2020). Currently it is being tested in 30 pilot schools and 20 Nazarbayev Intellectual schools created specifically for this purpose (Yakovets & Dzhadrina, 2014). However, in their study on perspectives of key education stakeholders in Kazakhstan, Mehisto, Kambatyrova & Nurseitova (2014) present several challenges in achieving these goals. Among these challenges is key stakeholders' insufficient understanding of language-in-education policy in multilingual education concept and the limited knowledge about other countries' experiences and results in implementing it. Therefore, a review of articles and official documents on language-in-education policy in Kazakhstan might help to fill this gap in the knowledge.

Before studying a concept, one must understand all terms and notion connected. Bernard Spolsky (2012) opens the first chapter of *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy* with a remark of Charles Fergusson on the hardships that linguists have in "naming concepts" (p. 3). Linguists and policy-makers use a variety of terms ranging from language-in-education policy, language education policy, language acquisition policy, to education language policy, with language-in-education policy being probably the most accepted and commonly used terms for the same concept (Tollefson, 2011). Some linguists call the field *language planning and language policy* and abbreviate it LPLP (Tollefson, 2011) and others refer to it as *language planning and policy*, so the abbreviation is LPP (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). In the scope of this work, language planning and language policy are regarded as a subfield of sociolinguistics, and language planning and language policy are used as separate terms. Since language planning and language policy both may be abbreviated as LP, I have decided not to use any abbreviation to avoid creating confusion and misunderstanding. In addition, I only use language-in-education policy (policies) when referring to the concept, although cited scholars may have used another variation. In the next section, I put forward several paragon definitions by more prominent and acknowledged scholars.

Language Policy

Even though the concept of language policy is more than a sum of its constituent words, most people unfamiliar with the term would probably assume that it has something to do with policy. In fact, even scholars do so. For instance, Kaplan and Baldauf (as cited in Johnson, 2013) defined the notion as "a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the societies, group or system" that is proposed by government (p. 4). This is a very top-down perception where an authoritative body first plans the language change and only after that introduces the policy, where language policy is only the aid to make the change happen. McGroarty's (as cited in Lo Bianco, 2010) definition of language policy as a "synthesis of authoritative resolutions and dominant community practices" seconds this opinion (p. 145). Expanding Kaplan and Baldauf and McGroarty's visions of language policy, some scholars conclude that language policy can also be of a grassroots nature. Tollefson (2011) states that it can emerge at different levels of society and

may be written in official documents or inherently understood without them. In his book, *Language-in-Education Policies*, Liddicoat (2013) examines existing definitions of language policy and agrees that language policy can appear at any level of the whole society, not just its ruling part.

Some scholars contend that language policy is not just laws and rules but a more complex concept. For example, Schiffman (as cited in Johnson, 2013) states that language policy is “primarily a social construct,” so regardless of the existence of legislation about the language, it can exist in the society; however, without the society it cannot (p. 4). Spolsky (2004) argues that official documents are just one obvious, easy-to-notice component of language policy, and that different ideological expectations for the language that are born within various communities and lead to attempts to manage the language originate language policy. McCarty (cited in Johnson, 2013) agrees with Spolsky that language policy is “a complex sociocultural process” produced in human interactions and negotiations and is more than a collection of legal texts (p. 6). It seems that language policy is based on people’s beliefs and values built on their pasts. Spolsky divides language policy into three components: “language practices, language beliefs and ideology, and explicit policies and plans resulting from language- management or planning activities that attempt to modify the practices and ideologies” (p. 39). Therefore, an understanding of language policy by examining legislation only is not complete without other components.

It was noted previously that language policy can occur on different levels of society, top-down or bottom-up, and can be overtly and explicitly noted in written or spoken official documents. For example, Kazakhstan’s Law on Language(s) (1997), which proclaimed Kazakh as an official language of state and Russian as the language of interethnic communication, is an example of an overt language policy. As it is stated in articles Six and Seven of this law, all citizens of Kazakhstan have the right to use their “mother” tongue, the right to choose a language of communication, upbringing, education and creative work and that infringement of the rights of citizens on linguistic grounds is forbidden. In addition, Johnson (2013) concludes that language policy can be covert, purposely hidden at the top or bottom levels, and implicit, emerging without or in defiance of authoritative policy decrees. An example for covert language policy can be the process of Kazakhization, which is presented as national ideology of revitalization of Kazakh and building a new ethnic identity (Smagulova, 2008). This process started at the top and involved such action as moving the capital city to a Russian-dominant area to increase influx of Kazakhs to the region or making textbooks more pro-Kazakh oriented. This narrative is heard in the president’s addresses to the nation where he urges Kazakhs to speak Kazakh with each other.

In addition to being covert or overt, language policy can also be *de jure* which means recorded in legislative documents, or *de facto*, which refers to real practices that happen in the society (Johnson, 2013). Kazakhization language policy has never been documented in the legislation, whereas Russian was stripped of its official status of language of inter-ethnic communication in the Constitution adapted in 1995 and then regained it two years later (Matuszkiewicz, 2010). This policy has never become *de jure*, and was not able to become *de facto* in all regions of Kazakhstan. There are many reasons for that, starting from the fact that many citizens of Kazakhstan from diverse ethnic groups do not speak the Kazakh language, while Kazakhs themselves are divided into two groups with different language ideologies about Russian and Kazakh and have established identities as “Russian-speaking Kazakh” usually someone from the city or from the north of the country and “Kazakh-speaking Kazakh,” someone from rural area or from other parts of the country (Yessenova, 2003). Drawing on Johnson’s previously stated definition of an implicit language policy, “Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs” have fully endorsed Kazakhization process, while “Russian-speaking Kazakhs” may have adopted practices that are opposing this process. It is also worth mentioning that the existence of legislative documents on language policy does not guarantee its implementation or success (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). In Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language is the official state language, but in most regions of the country the Russian language is used in legal documentation, although, there were several initiatives to switch to the use of Kazakh only. It is so because despite the law, many Russian speaking citizens do not know the Kazakh language enough to use it in such capacity, while many speakers of Kazakh can speak Russian as well.

As mentioned above, MES’s SPED for 2011-2020 set target indicators for Trilingual Policy implementation (MES, 2010), and based on this fact we can conclude that it is top-down and overt, it is *de jure* and is at moment being piloted before it can be spread nationwide and become *de facto*. Specifics of language policy in education will be discussed in the next section.

Language-in-Education Policy

Language policy can come to be at any levels of the society. Moreover, Ricento (as cited in Liddicoat, 2013) claims that language policies exist in some form in all domains of the society. Many scholars agree on the fact that education is one of the most significant and influential domain (de Jong, 2011; Liddicoat, 2013;

Spolsky, 2004). Probably, not many scholars familiar with Fishman's (as cited in Baker, 2001) GIDS scale that would question the importance of schools and formal education as a means to preserve or revitalize the language, or bring it to death. Knowing and understanding language-in-education policy is very important; therefore, in this part of my work, I would define the concept of language-in-education policy and present some controversies that surround it.

Johnson (2013) presents a broad concept of language-in-education policy as any policy that influences language(s) used in education (classrooms and schools), regardless of whether they are overt or covert, official or unofficial, and at which layer and in which context they emerged. Following this definition, any policy that has the potential to change or affect languages used in formal education can be treated as language-in-education policy. Kaplan and Baldauf (as cited in Liddicoat, 2013) disagree, since according to them, language-in-education policies tell which languages society would acquire through education, and they describe objectives of language-in-education policy such as developing human capital, symbolic empowerment and consolidation of the existing imagined community and even building a nation. These two scholars seem to regard only the perspective of language-in-education policy on symbolic power, whom these policies marginalize and whom empower, whereas this paper attempts to analyze language policies in Kazakhstan using a different framework of reference.

Analysis of any language policy can be done from many different perspectives and by asking various questions. To analyze dimensions and their relationships to education of language policies, de Jong (2011) proposes to employ Cooper's (1989) vision of the language planning and policy and ask and seek answers to the question, "Who plans what (language) practices for whom, how, under what conditions, and for what purpose?" (p. 102). This is an excellent framework to analyze real language policies in real life. The Trilingual Policy initiated in Kazakhstan fits the description of language-in-education policy perfectly because it is the language policy regarding three languages that are to be used in formal education in Kazakhstan. If we use Cooper's (1989) framework to analyze Kazakhstan's Trilingual Policy, it reveals that it is a covert top-down policy designed for the whole generation of young people. It is designed to use three languages in mainstream education nationwide, each language for a specific subject and intended to accomplish many goals at once: revitalize and strengthen Kazakh to preserve the majority ethnic group's past, maintain Russian to avoid causing inter-ethnic tension, and increase the number of English speakers as a part of globalization. However, we can find the answer to the "under what conditions and for what purpose" part of the question not only as from the text itself, but also between the lines, because, as mentioned before, some language policy objectives can be covert. If we borrow Hornberger and Ricento's (1996) famous metaphorical onion, where they compared layers of language policy to layers of the vegetable, even overtly written language policy can have some hidden agendas or possible outcomes that had not considered before the decision was made. On paper, the aim of the Trilingual Policy is to increase multilingualism in the society; however, by constraining languages used in education to specific areas, one can restrain their growth. The Kazakh language is the most vulnerable of three in that regard; Russia will continue develop the Russian language, so its limited use in Kazakhstani schools would not affect it much, and English holds an unshakeable position in the globe. Kazakh is currently used to teach the following subjects only: Kazakh language, Kazakh history and geography. If continued in this way, Kazakh can become a language of the past. As de Jong (2011) observes, "in today's multilingual and multicultural societies, schools are key sites where some linguistic and cultural resources are reinforced and others are devalued" (p. 102). Therefore, the languages of ethnic minority groups would not be used in the school education can experience shift and even death of their language, and their speakers may become marginalized. Although, providing education in all 130 languages of 130 ethnicities that inhabit Kazakhstan might not be feasible, some accommodation should be made, like after-school language classes.

To conclude the whole review, language planning and language policy probably existed in all societies from the moments people acquired ability to speak. No one should underestimate the significance of language policies in all levels of society, be it written or spoken, covert or overt, explicit or implicit, and their impacts on and within the society. Language-in-education policies are even more important and influential, as they directly affect children, the future of any nation. Implementing a language-in-education policy all mainstream schools should be carefully evaluated before and during even more scrupulous implementation. Kazakhstani society has experienced various language policies, some that were prescribed vertically and others that emerged from within. Successful implementation of the Trilingual Policy, although not the first language policy introduced and promoted from the top, still requires careful planning and execution. In addition to that popularization of this policy among society, more than prescription from the policy-makers is needed to avoid its resistance. Creation of an open access platform where information regarding all aspects of the policy, from implementation stages to the benefits it will bring, may help to alleviate the anxiety of many people.

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